

MARKETING FAMILY RESOURCE CENTRES IN COUNTY DONEGAL

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Abstract

Family Resource Centres play a key role in the Irish local communities. This thesis analyses the marketing strategies implemented by these organisations. A literature review covers the vision, role and challenges of the non-profit organisations sector globally and then focuses on Family Resource Centres in Ireland and particularly in County Donegal.

A qualitative research method in form of in-depth interviews and focus group discussion is employed. Managers of six Family Resources Centres participated in in-depth interviews on the marketing strategies implemented by their organisation. Users of Cara House FRC also participated in a focus group to discuss their perceptions on the services provided by Cara House FRC.

The findings indicate that Family Resource Centres engage in marketing activities to reach their target groups; however, there is a need to implement marketing research, customer-centred techniques and establish approaches to target not only prospect users but also volunteers.

The current challenges faced by the sector are also explained in detailed based on literature review and in-depth interviews. Recommendations for a best practice model are also included as a research outcome.

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Table of Contents

	Page No.
Abstract.....	i
Acknowledgements.....	ii
Table of Contents.....	iii-vi
List of Figures and Tables.....	vii
 Chapter One: Introduction	
1.1 Context.....	1
1.2 Research Aim and Questions.....	2-4
 Chapter Two: Literature Review	
2.1 Introduction.....	5
2.2.1 An overview of voluntary & community service groups.....	6
2.2.2 Globally: Social Enterprises.....	6
2.2.3 Social purpose.....	7
2.2.4 Non-profit distributing.....	7
2.2.5 Assets held in trust.....	8
2.2.6 Democracy & Accountability.....	8

2.3.1 Family Resource Centres in Ireland.....	8
2.3.2 What are Family Resource Centres and how do they operate?.....	8-9
2.3.3 Vision of Family Resource Centres in Ireland.....	9
2.3.4 Target Groups.....	10-11
2.3.5 Service Offerings.....	11-12
2.3.6 Current Challenges.....	12-14
2.4.1 County Donegal.....	14-15
2.4.2 Catchment Area.....	15-16
2.4.3 Characteristics of target groups in the region.....	17
2.5.1 Marketing Strategies for Non-profit organisations.....	17
2.5.2 Strategic Marketing Tasks: Planning & Evaluation.....	18-19
2.5.3 What kind of marketing strategies are implemented by FRCs?.....	19
2.5.4 Evaluation of the strategies implemented by FRCs.....	20-22
2.6 Summary.....	22

Chapter Three: Research Methodology

3.1 Introduction.....	24
3.2 Profile of target population.....	25
3.3 Research Method Selected.....	26
3.3.1 Benefits provided by the Qualitative Research Method.....	27
3.3.2 Limitations.....	28
3.4 Data Collection Process Technique.....	28-29
3.5 Analysis and presentation of findings.....	29

Chapter Four: Research Findings

4.1 Introduction.....	30
4.2.1 In-depth Interviews findings.....	30
4.2.2 Organisations’ vision & role in the community.....	30-34
4.3.1 Organisations’ view on marketing activities.....	34
4.3.2 The relevance of marketing activities in the organisation.....	34
4.3.3 Marketing strategies.....	35-36
4.3.4 Promotion.....	36-38
4.4.1 Challenges.....	39
4.4.2 Funding.....	39
4.4.3 New regulations.....	40
4.4.4 Dependency on staff and volunteers.....	40
4.4.5 People’s expectations on the role of FRCs.....	41
4.4.6 Providing quality service with limited resources	41
4.5.1 Focus group findings.....	42-44

Chapter Five: Discussion

5.1 Introduction.....	44
5.2 The implementation of marketing strategies in FRCs in County Donegal.....	44-45
5.3 An evaluation of FRCs marketing performance.....	46

Chapter Six: Conclusions & Recommendations

6.1 Conclusions and Recommendations.....47-51

References.....52-57

Appendices:

Appendix A:

List of Family Resource Centres that participated in the research.....58

Appendix B:

Application form for Ethical Approval.....59-64

Appendix C:

Interview questions.....65-67

Appendix D:

Focus Group Questions.....68-70

Appendix E:

List of abbreviations.....71

List of Figures and Tables

List of figures	Page Number
Graph 1.1: Family Resource Centres in the Western Region.....	16

List of Tables

Table 1.1 Overview of literature review.....	5
Table 2.1 Profile of target groups.....	12
Table 2.2 Services provided by Family Resource Centres.....	13
Table 2.3 Family Resource Centres in County Donegal.....	17
Table 2.4 Developing capacity & leadership within communities.....	22
Table 2.5 Establishing & Coordinating a community response.....	22
Table 2.6 Supporting community groups & initiatives.....	23
Table 2.7 Providing education & training opportunities.....	24
Table 3.1 Research approaches.....	26

1. Chapter One – Introduction

1.1 Context

The voluntary and community service organisations can be considered as some of the most important sectors in the Irish economy. Voluntary and community services are an essential feature of any modern, democratic, pluralist state, working together with public services for the welfare and well-being of all citizens, especially those who are most disadvantaged (Acheson, N *et al.*, 2006). These organisations play a key part in the development of local communities since they provide services aiming to satisfy the specific needs and wants of their members.

Throughout time, the growing number of voluntary organisations has made a positive impact in the Irish society. By the opening of the 21st century, Ireland had a well-established voluntary and community sector, fulfilling an important task in the provision of social and related services; a developed concept of its role in the civil society; and recognition by the state of its importance (Harvey, 2012). The Irish Examiner (June 28, 2010) also reports that these sectors represent an estimated € 6.5 billion in services and economic outputs. Moreover, an estimated 53,000 people are employed full-time in the community and voluntary sector.

In 1994, the Department of Social Welfare funded 10 Family Resource Centres motivated by the perception of a gap in statutory support for community development activities focused on support for families and tackling child poverty (SPEAK Report, 2010). As demand for the services has been growing, especially in recent years; the number of Family Resource Centres has been increasing in different regions of the country. According to the SPEAK Report (2011), there are currently 107 communities supported through the Family and Community

Services Resource Centre Programme in the Republic of Ireland; a Family Resource Centre is located in 106 of these.

Unfortunately, the future of Family Resource Centres as well as other voluntary organisations remains uncertain due to the current economic downturn and the new regulations for the sector. The government's cut plan includes the community service sector (O'Brien, 2009). In recent years, there have been many campaigns against community services cut plans. In 2009, for example; thousands of workers in Family Resource Centres protested about current and proposed cuts in the sector (Healy, 2009). In other instances, some community services were forced to close down following the withdrawal of funding (Oireachtas Brief, 2011).

1.2 Research aims and questions

Originally, the purpose of this work was to analyse the implementation of marketing strategies in Family Resource centres and Community Service Groups in Letterkenny. However, this objective was modified in order to focus on one sector only: Family Resource Centres (FRC) in County Donegal. This change was made taking into account some relevant elements regarding the research process, which can ensure the fulfilment of the objectives set in this study. The benefits of this change of approach are:

- It will allow the researcher to focus on the implementation of marketing strategies in one specific sector – FRC in county Donegal
- It will allow the researcher to establish a better profile of FRCs in the county
- It will allow the researcher to perform a thorough evaluation on the marketing performance of this particular sector in county Donegal
- It will allow the researcher to make more recommendations for this sector based on best performing marketing strategies used by FRCs in the region

The research questions are based on the role that Family Resource Centres play in the communities and focus on the key marketing aspects involved in fulfilling those roles.

1. What is the vision of Family Resource Centres in Ireland?
2. Which are the current challenges faced by FRCs in Ireland to achieve their objectives?
3. What is the role of Family Resource Centres in County Donegal?
4. Which are the challenges faced by FRCs in County Donegal at present?
5. What kind of marketing strategies are implemented by Family Resource Centres in County Donegal to target a wide range of customer segments?
6. What is the perception of Cara House FRC users on the organisation and its service offerings?

This research aims to deliver the following outcomes:

An analysis of the implementation of marketing strategies in Family Resource Centres in County Donegal. This objective will be achieved through data collection (in-depth interviews and focus groups). This information will provide the reader with a clear panorama of the marketing strategies currently used by Family Resource Centres in the county. Managers and staff members of Community Services, Voluntary sectors, students

1. of Social & Community Studies and Marketing students can be particularly benefited from this study.
2. An analysis of findings and an evaluation of their marketing performance. This objective will be achieved through data collection. This information can be valuable for those who are in management positions or staff members who are involved in taking decisions regarding the marketing of non-profit organisations.
3. A best practice model for the implementation of marketing strategies based on findings. This goal will be achieved through literature review and data collection. A best practice model can serve managers and staff members in a non-profit organisation to establish what changes need to be made to improve the organisation's performance. The outcome of this objective is a clear understanding on the factors to take into account when marketing a non-profit organisation.

Family Resource Centres provide services that have been gaining relevance in the Irish communities due to the current economic climate. Implementing marketing strategies in order to reach the target groups plays a vital part in any organisation and this sector is not an exception. This research aims to provide not only an overview of the marketing strategies used in FRCs in county Donegal but also an analysis and evaluation of those strategies.

2. Chapter Two - Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

The literature review covers key issues related to the operation of Family Resource Centres in Ireland and the marketing strategies implemented in this particular sector. The structure of the literature review is based on two sections. The table below shows the objectives and research questions of the two sections:

Table 1.1 Overview of Literature Review

Section	Objectives	Research Questions
Section 1: Overview of the sector	To provide an overview of voluntary and community service sectors globally and in Ireland focusing on County Donegal.	Globally: What are Social Enterprises? How do they operate? What are their roles in the market nowadays? Ireland: What is vision of Family Resource Centres? How do they operate? Which are their target groups and service offerings? What are their challenges? County Donegal: What is the role of FRCS in County Donegal? Which are their target groups, service offerings and challenges?
Section 2: Marketing Strategies	To analyse the marketing strategies implemented by non-profit organizations – focusing on FRCs in Ireland	-Which are the marketing tasks for non-profit organisations? -What kind of marketing strategies do FRCS in Ireland use to reach the target groups? -How effective are the marketing strategies used by FRCs?

2.2.1 An overview of voluntary and community service organisations

The purpose of this section is to analyse the vision and role of voluntary and community service organisations in global terms and then in Ireland focusing on County Donegal. This section also covers the sector's target groups, their service offerings and current challenges.

2.2.2 Globally: Social Enterprises

Voluntary and community service groups play a vital task in the local communities; in global terms, these organisations are denominated as social enterprises. A social enterprise is a business with primarily social objectives whose surpluses are principally reinvested for that purpose in the business or in the community, rather than being driven by the need to maximise profits for shareholders and owners (Pearce, 2003).

Based on Pearce (2003) definition of social enterprises, the philosophy and vision of social enterprises make these organisations different from other sectors in the market. Thus, there are some implications and challenges involved in the operation of these organisations due to the characteristics of the sector.

2.2.3 Social purpose

A key point regarding the main purpose of social enterprises – social purpose, is the need to establish a clear vision of the organisation's purpose to guide the establishment of a mission statement as well as short and long term goals to fulfil their role effectively. It is essential to have a good understanding of the organisation's purpose in order to establish and implement the most suitable marketing strategies for the particular communities where they operate.

2.2.4 Non-profit distributing

As the objective of social enterprises is not making profit and commercial activity is not a priority; it is necessary to establish clear guidelines. This could represent a challenge since some organisations could engage more on economic activities in order to provide services to the public or simply to survive; especially as nowadays funding from the government has been cut and donations from the public and other organisations are likely to drop. Crossan *et al* (2011) report that there are some key entrepreneurial differentiating themes between ‘social’ and ‘social commercial’ organisations based on their management style. As a result, the management style for non-profit organisations or the third sector as some researchers refer to has to be in agreement with the organisation’s aim and purpose.

2.2.5 Assets held in trust

Another important characteristic of social enterprises has to do with assets held in trust or the common ownership principle. This principle implies that workers, directors, members or stakeholders cannot sell off and divide assets of the social enterprise. The principle behind social enterprises makes it different from other organisations where members can have the possibility of gaining profit through the organisation’s assets. As a result, social enterprises need the full commitment as well as integrity of those involved in them.

2.2.6 Democracy & Accountability

Establishing strategies to practice democratic membership where the enterprise can be accountable to members of the community is essential in the successful operation of social

enterprises. Choosing the appropriate channels of accountability can represent a challenge since it is necessary to have a clear understanding of the community's culture in order to decide the best system of communication to build up a relationship based on democratic participation.

2.3.1 Family Resource Centres in Ireland

The purpose of this section is to explore the reality of FRCs in Ireland, to analyse the vision and objectives of Family support programmes, the target groups, service offerings and reports on their development.

2.3.2 What are Family Resource Centres and how do they operate?

The main purpose of FRCs in Ireland is to provide services aimed to fulfil the needs of the family unit. According to Pinkerson *et al.* (2004) the key characteristics of Family Support Programs (FSP) in the country are:

- The FSP comprises of task (a set of activities) and process (a style of work)
- The FSP can be informed by a multi - sectoral approach
- The FSP aim to strengthen the social networks of children and parents through supporting their families and communities
- Specific care is taken to focus on those who are vulnerable or at risk.

FRCs in Ireland are governed by policies regulating this sector; they are legally constituted as companies limited by guarantee with no share capital (Family Support Agency, 2011). As most social enterprises, Family Resource Centres generate income streams from cash trading receipts from sale of services, contracts, including service level agreements with the public sector to deliver services, grants from the public sector, grants from trusts and foundations, revenue subsidies, volunteer labour and fundraising activities Pearce (2003).

Since 2003 the Family Support Agency has had overall responsibility for the programme management, including monitoring and support of centres, financial administration and executive decision-making. During 2010 responsibility for the Family Support Agency transferred from the Department of Community, Equality and Gaeltacht Affairs to the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (SPEAK REPORT 2010).

2.3.3 Vision of Family Resource Centres in Ireland

In the last decade, the Irish government has been providing support to families establishing organisations in communities throughout the country. The vision of FRCs is improving the well being of parents and children by supporting all families through the normal challenges of family life (Family Support Agency, 2011).

The strategy to support families was developed taking into account the important role of a family in every individual's life and it aims to address the needs of families, especially those living in disadvantage areas. Thus, providing services to satisfy the needs and wants of the family unit is at the heart of all the established strategies in FRCs in Ireland.

2.3.4 Target Groups

Firstly, it is necessary to have a clear understanding of the target group - the family unit in Ireland. Family may be defined as the set of close personal relationships that link people together. The most conventional definition of family recognises a broad concept, usually referred to as 'de facto families', based on a wide set of intimate relationships between couples, between parents and children, and between extended family members (Strategic Framework for family Support, 2011). These considerations highlight the need to analyse the current situation of the family unit in Ireland in order to establish realistic objectives.

Lunn and Fahey (2011) report that of the 1.15 million children, 75 per cent live with two married parents, 18 per cent with a lone parent and 6 per cent with cohabiting parents based on a detailed statistical analysis of census 2006. More recent studies on the Irish family structure report that 70 per cent of Irish children live in families based on marriage; however, it is possible to identify a wide range of 'de facto' families, as 15 per cent of children live with parents who are cohabiting and 14 per cent of them live with parents without a partner. Likewise, the recent passing of the Civil Partnership Act 2010 adds a new dimension to the family unit. (Family support Agency, 2011)

In spite of serving different user segments Family Resource Centres focuses particularly in the well being of children. This fact can be seen in the profile of target groups, which is based on children's needs as well as the recent transfer of FRCs to the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (SPEAK Report, 2010). The table below shows the profile of the target group.

Table 2.1 Profile of target groups

Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4
<p>Base Population: The majority of children whose needs are being met, they utilise universal services and community resources as required</p>	<p>Children with additional needs: Vulnerable children and their families, who require additional support to promote social inclusion, to reduce levels of vulnerability within the family.</p>	<p>Children in need: Children with complex needs that may be chronic and enduring (physical and emotional). These may include some children in need of safeguarding or children with disabilities.</p>	<p>Children with complex and/or acute needs: Children who are suffering or likely to suffer significant harm without the provision of services.</p>

2.3.5 Service Offerings

The services provided by Family Resource Centres in Ireland are aimed to satisfy the needs of families, individuals and the local community. The Family Support Agency (2011) reports that family needs can be classified in ‘Household-Level Needs’ (the needs of parents and children in the household) and ‘Area - Level Needs’ (the needs of the area in which the Family Resource Centre is located). The table below shows detailed information on the services provided.

Table 2.2 Services provided by FRCs

Target Groups	Service Offerings
Families & Individuals	Practical Assistance, provision of information, advice, counselling and support, delivery of education courses and training opportunities, the provision of local family support services (childcare facilities, after-school clubs and homework clubs), the support of personal and group development through the use of community arts
Local Communities	Practical Assistance (help with organisational structures, assistance to access funding or advice on how to address specific social issues, access to information technology, office equipment and administrative supports), the establishment and maintenance of new community groups, the provision of broader community services and development initiatives, bridging the gap between mainstream service providers and local communities, building partnerships between other voluntary and statutory agencies operating in each locality.

Currently, Family Resource Centres are faced with the challenge of a changed family structure and lifestyle, which implies that approaches to reach the target groups need to be reviewed. Likewise, it is essential to establish methods to evaluate the efficiency of the services provided to users under the current circumstances.

2.3.6 Current Challenges

One of the key materials in this research is the Speak Report (Strategic Planning, Evaluation and Knowledge – networking), which provides detailed information on the performance of Family Resource Centres in Ireland on a yearly basis. Every Family Resource Centre in Ireland submits a report on the organisation’s performance throughout the year to the Family

Support Agency. This section focuses on two of the main challenges faced by FRCs during the years 2010 and 2011: funding allocation and expenses involved in their operation

Family Resource centres in Ireland receive a core funding allocation from the Family Support Agency. This core funding is provided to each Family Resource Centre to cover employment cost relating to core-funded staff, rent and overheads. SPEAK Report 2010 indicates the core funding granted by the Family Support Agency was approximately €138,164 per Family Resource Centre. In 2011; however, the average core funding to a Family Resource Centre was €133,861. The SPEAK Report 2011 shows that many Family Resource Centres received less than €100,000.

Moreover, FRCs also receive the funding support of Working Partners. Some of the Working Partners are the following organisations: Health Service Executive, VEC, FAS Pobal, County Childcare Cttee, Nat/Regional Networks, schools, Local Authority and Local organisations (Cara House FRC, Annual Report 2011)

The decrease in the amount of core funding allocated to Family Resource Centres has made an impact in their current operations. In most cases, in order to reduce the expenses FRCs are forced to set priorities in their daily operation, making sure to allocate money for these priorities and reducing other expenses. In some cases, FRCs are being forced to close earlier or provide services only certain days of the week. FRCs in the whole country has been struggling for a few years to get their funding allocation; this can be seen in the local newspaper reports. Drogheda Independent (2009) noted the McCarthy (An Bord Snip Nua) recommended abolishing the family Support Agency to save the Exchequer EUR.30million. Kilkenny people (2009) asserts that most of the FRCs in the country have been built in

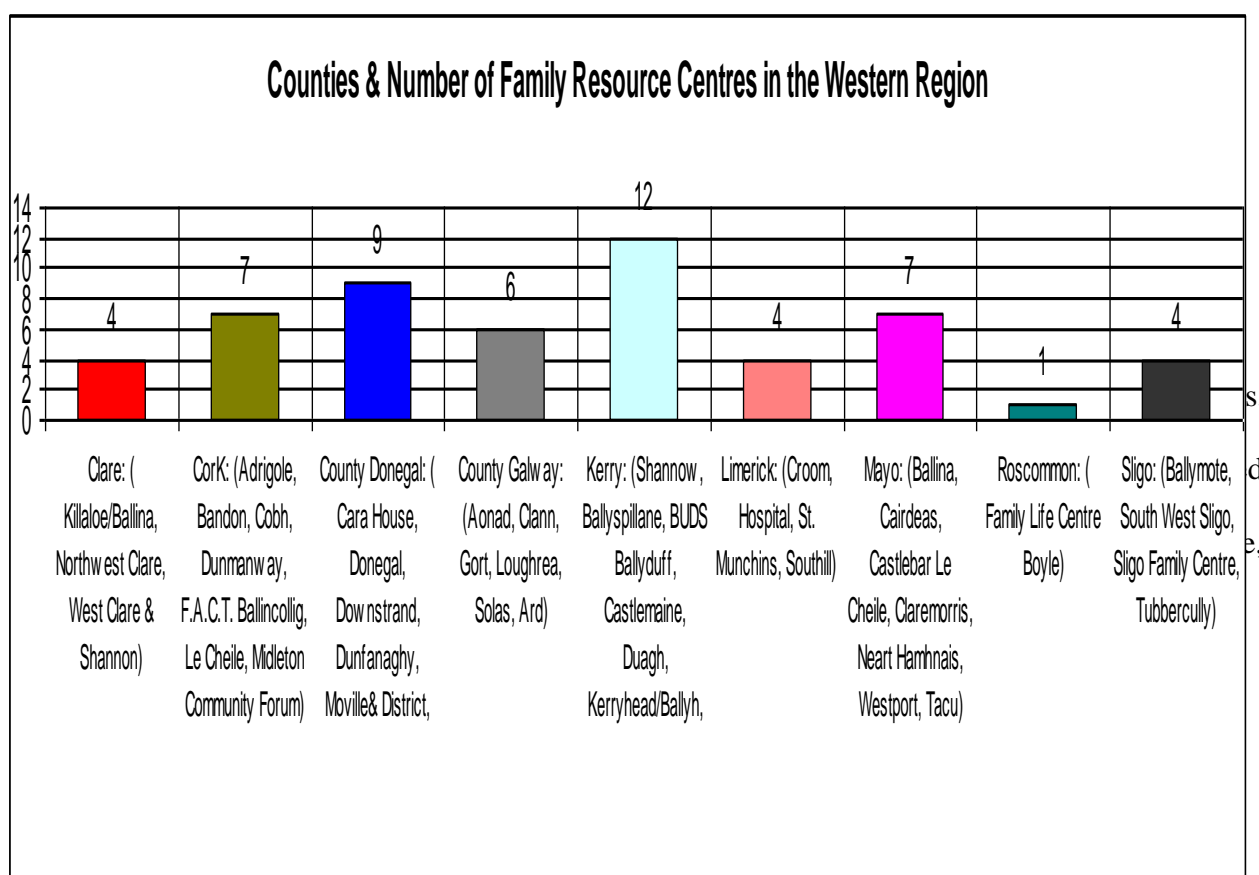
partnership with volunteers at an annual cost to the state of EUR18 million; however the social and economic return to the state is multiples of that figure. Bray People (2009) reports that a 70 per cent cut in core funding will lead to their closure or, at best, drastically reduced services and activities for the local communities..

2.4.1 County Donegal

The purpose of this section is to analyse the operation, tasks and availability of FRCs in County Donegal as well as the target groups in this particular region.

In September 2010, West Training and Development signed a contract with the Family Support Agency to act as Regional Support Agency to 54 FRCS comprising the Family and Community Services Resource Centre Programme, Western Region under the Development Plan 2007-2013 (Western Training and Development, Annual Report, 2011). The West Training and Development (2011) reports that the range of services the organisation provides to FRCs includes developing and maintaining the skill base of the organisation's staff and volunteers (in relation to legal and financial governance, budgeting and accounting, recruitment and employment issues, planning and evaluation and internal communication) and maintaining a community development and family support focus. The Graph below shows the number of FRCs available in the Western Region (Western Training and Development 2011).

Graph 1.1 FRCs in the Western Region



County Donegal has one of the highest numbers of FRCs in the region; County Kerry has the highest number of FRCs (twelve) while County Roscommon has the lowest (only one FRC). This number reflects that County Donegal is a region where there is a high demand for the kind of services provided by FRCs.

2.4.2 Catchment Area

The Family Support Agency (www.fsa.ie) reports on the catchment area and service offerings of the Family Resource Centres in County Donegal. The table below shows the FRCs available in County Donegal and their catchment area.

Table 2.3 Family Resource Centres in County Donegal

Family Resource Centre	Catchment Area
Cara House FRC	Letterkenny urban and rural areas
Donegal FRC	Donegal Town, Ballintra, Inver and Barnesmore
Downstrands FRC	Ardara, Narin, Portnoo, Rosbeg and Glenties
Dunfanaghy FRC	Dunfanaghy
Mevagh FRC	Rosgoill, Carrigart, Downings, Glen
Moville and District FRC	East Inishowen
Raphoe FRC	Raphoe and surrounding areas
St. Johnston & Carrigans FRC	St. Johnston & Carrigans wider area of East Donegal
The Forge FRC	Pettigo, Templecarn, Grousehall, Kesh, Belleek

Most of these Family Resource Centres are located in rural areas of the county. Cara House FRC is the only Family Resource Centre providing services in an urban area; which means that Cara House can be more accessible for some users in the region. Transportation can be an issue for users in cases where Family Resource Centres are located in remote areas.

According to Woodruffe (1995) one of the most important factors for non-profit organisations is to establish themselves in locations where clients and potential clients can reach them, and where they, in turn, can reach their contributors. As Family Resource Centres have a face-to-face contact with their users; the location is a relevant aspect in their operation. Otherwise, FRCs need to be creative in their approach to reach the target market. Ensuring that services are available and accessible is essential for this sector since one of their goals is to build up a relationship with the users.

2.4.3 Characteristics of target groups in the region

As the main objective of Family Resource Centres in Ireland is to provide services for families particularly those living in disadvantage areas; County Donegal can be considered as a region where this kind of services are necessary for several reasons. Planning for Inclusion in County Donegal (2009) explains that County Donegal is the fifth most rurally dispersed county in the state; its strategic links and provision of essential services are below the national standards. Planning for Inclusion in County Donegal (2009) also identifies the groups most at risk of poverty in this region as women, age dependent / young people, older people, lone parents, rural dwellers, unemployed people, people with lower level of education attainment and Ethnic minorities (travellers, asylum seekers, migrant workers).

The objectives of FRCs in this region are to provide information, advice and support to target groups and families in the area. Dealing with such a diverse user segments makes it challenging ‘to be everything for everybody’ in other words, providing quality services for the Woodruffe (1995) different target groups. The marketing strategies implemented by the FRCs in the county will be further investigated as part of this research study.

2.5.1 Marketing strategies for non-profit organisations.

The purpose of this section is to analyse the marketing strategies implemented in the non-profit sector and particularly in Family Resource Centres. Not for profit organisations are faced with the same strategic tasks as business concerns: strategic planning, mission definition, objectives setting, implementation, monitoring and evaluation Woodruffe (1995).

These strategic tasks interrelate to each other and are equally important in the successful operation of the non-profit organisation sector.

2.5.2 Strategic Marketing Tasks: Planning and evaluation

Marketing planning is the foundation of an effective marketing strategy. Bryson (2004) asserts that a non-profit organisation can achieve many goals through strategic marketing planning. In fact, marketing planning can help to clarify organisational mission and values, to assess the external and internal environments, to identify strengths, opportunities and threats, to identify the strategic issues facing the organisation, to formulate strategies to manage the issues, to review and adopt the strategies or strategic plan.

An in-depth analysis of the target groups' behaviour is also essential in order to establish an effective marketing plan. According to Kotler and Andreasen (1996) the ultimate objective of all marketing strategy and tactics is to influence target audience behaviour. The ultimate goal is behaviour change and the proper philosophy is customer centred, it is essential that all strategic planning start with customer behaviour.

Marketing planning can be particularly useful for the non-profit organisation sector to deal with their changed circumstances in order to analyse their strengths, weaknesses and identify opportunities in the current market. Marketing planning can ensure that the strategies implemented by an organisation can be regularly assessed and measures can be taken to achieve the objectives.

Another key strategic task for non-profit organisations is to establish strategies to measuring performance. Poister (2003) reports that performance measurement is intended to produce objective, relevant information that can be used to strengthen management, inform decision-making, achieve results and improve overall performance. Kotler and Andreasen (1996) also state that an organisation's goals should give direction to the staff and describe pathways to its future and they should also offer benchmarks for measuring progress.

2.5.3 What kind of marketing strategies are implemented by FRCs?

The strategy implemented by FRCs is based on programmes of work that focus on the particular needs of local communities. FRCs are required to compile Strategic Plans every three years; separate Action Plans are produced on an annual basis to articulate how these strategies will be realised and prior the drafting of Strategic Plans, FRCs undertake community consultation exercises. (Western Training and Development, 2011)

The Family Support Agency works with local communities to establish the local strategy, which requires knowledge of family, needs in the catchment area, drawing on local consultations and data sources on indicators of need. The process of preparing the local strategy will facilitate local participation in setting targets for each outcome (Family Support Agency, 2011). Nevertheless, the implementation of the strategy could be challenging, as it is necessary to establish a common approach for all FRCs in the country and at the same time to establish unique programmes based on local needs.

2.5.4 Evaluation of the strategies implemented by Family Resource Centres

The Family Support Agency establishes a strategy to evaluate the performance of FRCs in the country through the SPEAK Report. In this way, all FRCs in Ireland participate in this evaluation, which allows them to monitor the implementation of the strategies, to reflect on their effectiveness and to identify key points to improve the quality and process of the services provided to users. The purpose of this section is to evaluate the main strategies used by FRCs to fulfil its role in the communities based on the SPEAK Report 2011.

Table 2.4 Developing Capacity and Leadership within Communities

Strategy 1	Evaluation
<i>Developing Capacity and Leadership within Communities (Members of Voluntary Boards of Directors)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Most significant increase: Unemployed people -Targets groups more likely to be represented: Women, Older People, Unemployed People -Target groups least likely to be represented: Drug Users, Members of LGBT communities and Travellers

These figure show the need to re-evaluate the strategies used to reach the target groups that are least represented in the board of directors and establish a new approach to reach them. Moreover, the current economic climate has created new demands for services aiming to provide the Unemployed people with opportunities to participate constructively in the projects.

Table 2.5 Establishing and Coordinating a Community Response

Strategy 2	Evaluation
<p><i>Establishing and Coordinating a Community Response to Local needs</i></p>	<p>FRCS established the following initiatives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -182 youth groups -41 children initiatives -22 new community responses focusing on unemployment -15 mental health groups

According to the new figures provided by the SPEAK Report 2011, Family Resource Centres have developed different initiatives to serve the family unit. However, some segments have received the benefits of a higher number of initiatives to cater their needs compared to other segments. This could also cause duplication of services in certain instances where community services groups provide the same or similar services for a particular segment.

Table2.6 Supporting Community Groups and Initiatives

Strategy 3	Evaluation
<p><i>Supporting Community Groups and Initiatives that were established independently of Family Resource Centres</i></p>	<p>This support took the form of the following request:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Accessing funding (649 groups) -Support for organisational development (397 groups) - Addressing specific <i>policy issues</i> (359 groups)

As a marketing strategy supporting community groups and initiatives can be beneficial for to reach the target groups since it creates links with other organisations which work closely with them and it opens up opportunities to create strategic allegiances. It is also an opportunity to

build up relationships with the target groups and establish more efficient and effective ways to serve them.

Table 2.7 Providing Education and Training Opportunities

Strategy 4	Evaluation
Providing Education and Training opportunities	<p>The services are ranked according to the number of participants who completed the courses:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="879 667 1353 763">1. Education courses (17,870 participants) <li data-bbox="879 792 1342 824">2. Training courses (11,610 participants) <li data-bbox="879 853 1305 884">3. Self-Development Courses (7,722)

The increased number of participants in education and training courses points out the need to provide services to users who are affected by unemployment. Thus, it is possible to identify a new trend of users as a result of the current economic climate. This evaluation can also be a tool not only to assess the service offerings but also to focus on providing new services to meet the needs in the current market. According to Adirondack (1998) for each new and current product, special attention should be given to potential markets for each product or service.

2.6 Summary

As part of the research process, the literature review has proved to be an effective approach in answering the following research questions:

- The vision of FRCS in Ireland as government funding organisations to improve the well being of parents and children by supporting all families through the normal challenges of family life and especially to those who are disadvantaged or at risk
- The target groups consisting of the family unit and their service offerings aiming to meet the needs of the local communities
- Their three year strategic planning as marketing strategies and their evaluation through the SPEAK Report
- The main challenges faced by this sector as new regulations emerge and funding allocations are cut.

The literature has also provided detailed information on the vision, role and challenges faced by FRCs in County Donegal. Nevertheless, the literature findings can be complemented by a qualitative research approach since this can allow the researcher to observe first-hand the reality faced by FRCs in County Donegal, interact not only with the managers but also with users and verify if the findings in the literature differ in any way.

3 Chapter Three - Research Methodology

3.1 Introduction

The research process is based on the implementation of two approaches: Literature Review and qualitative research method. Thus, every research question will employ one of these approaches as shown on the table below.

Table 3.1 Research Approaches

Research Questions	Literature Review	In Depth interviews	Focus Group
1. What is the vision and role of Family Resource Centres in Ireland?	✓		
2. Which are the main challenges Family Resource Centres are currently facing to serve the target customer segments?	✓		
3. What is the vision and role of Family Resource Centres in County Donegal?	✓	✓	
4. Which are the main challenges Family Resource Centres in County Donegal are currently facing to fulfil their goals?		✓	
5. What kind of marketing strategies are implemented by Family Resource Centres in County Donegal to target a wide range of customer segments?		✓	
6. What is Cara House users' perception on the organisation and its service offerings?			✓

3.2 Profile of target population

There are a total of nine FRCs in County Donegal; this research will focus on the marketing performance of six of them. These FRCs were selected taking into consideration their different sizes, characteristics of the target groups and the area.

The target population in this research include the following FRCs:

1. Cara House FRC (Letterkenny)
2. Donegal FRC (Donegal)
3. Dunfanaghy FRC (Dunfanaghy)
4. Mevagh FRC (Downings)
5. Raphoe FRC (Raphoe)
6. St. Johnson & Carrigan FRC (Liffort)

The FRCs listed above are located in areas characterised by diverse issues regarding the needs of the target groups, the market sizes, opportunities and limitations. For instance, Letterkenny can be considered as the biggest city in the county with a high population that includes people from different nationalities. Liffort located near the border also has to deal with a different reality regarding their target groups. Downings and Dunfanaghy being popular holiday destinations are also faced with challenges which can differ from the rest. It is the purpose of this research to provide an accurate picture of the role fulfilled by FRCs in each of these locations and particularly the marketing strategies used to reach their target groups. Furthermore, this research will investigate the perception of users of Cara House FRC in Letterkenny in order to have a complete picture of both the organisation and its users.

3.3 Research Method Selected

The qualitative research method was selected as the most suitable for this study taking into account a key research goal:

- *The need to observe and interact with key informants* (managers and users):

Kotler and Andreasen (1996) assert that the starting point for understanding customer behaviour must be an understanding of the exchange relationship to be affected; that exchange must be seen from the target audience perspective. The qualitative research method provides an opportunity to observe this exchange relationship through in-depth and focus group discussion. According to Silverman (2010) if the researcher intention is to explore people every day behaviour, qualitative methods is recommended. Crabtree and Miller (1999) also note that qualitative methods are usually used for identification, description and explanation-generation.

The qualitative research method took the form of focus group discussion with users and in-depth interviews with key informants. Wilkinson (2004) describes focus group as a way of collecting qualitative data that involves engaging a small number of people in an informal group discussion focused around a particular topic or set of issues. According to Boyce and Neale (2006) in-depth interviews involves conducting intensive individual interviews with a small number of respondents to explore their perspective on a particular idea, program or situation.

3.3.1 Benefits provided by the qualitative research method

Focus group discussion and in-depth interviewing can be beneficial in the process of data collection since the observation of users' reactions and perceptions as well as the tasks and challenges of key informants play a vital part in this research.

According to Morgan, D. (1997) focus groups are the opportunity to observe a large amount of interaction on a topic in a limited period of time based on the researcher's ability to assemble and direct the focus group sessions; group discussions provide direct evidence about similarities and differences in the participants' opinions. On the other hand, interviewing is the quickest method to learn about the informants' day-to-day tasks (Travers, 2001). Individual interviews offer in terms of control stem from closer communication between interviewer and informant (Morgan, 1997). As a result, in-depth interviewing can be an effective tool to gain insightful information on the informants' opinions and experiences.

Bogdan and Knopp (1982) suggest that qualitative researchers are concerned with process rather than simple outcomes. Merriam (2009) also states that the focus in a qualitative research is the process, understanding and meaning. Qualitative research such as in -depth interviews or focus groups can be useful in identifying a problem, gathering background for later quantitative studies, pre testing services concepts, generating ideas for new services.

3.3.2 Limitations

Some of the limitations of this research have to do with the nature of individual and group interviews, such as creating an appropriate atmosphere where interviewees feel safe to express their opinions to gather accurate information. The wording of questions must also be carefully constructed to get all the relevant information in both; in depth and focus group interviews. In focus groups, it is important to handle the group in such a way as to give each participant an opportunity to express his/her opinions and avoid individuals dominating within the groups. Smithson (2000) states the relevance of taking focus groups as controlled group discussions and reflecting its interactive nature. Focus groups are largely limited to verbal behaviour and self-reported data. Second, even if focus groups do bring group interaction into the picture, there are still many interactions that cannot be re-created in focus groups.

3.4 Data Collection Process Technique

Data collection process took place in the following order:

- 1. In depth interviews with key informants**
- 2. Focus Group interviews**

1. In - depth interviews with key informants: Managers of Family Resource Centres were interviewed to find out the following points:

- The organisations vision & role in the community
- Its target groups and service offerings

- The marketing strategies used by the organisation
- Its current performance and challenges

2. Focus Group discussion with users of Cara House FRC: Before the discussion, participants of the focus group were asked to fill in a questionnaire on their perceptions, expectations and opinions on the services. The purpose of answering the questionnaires is to familiarise participants with the issues to be discussed afterwards in the focus group. There will be eight adult participants (four men and four women), each of them users of different services provided by Cara House. Participants' answers will be confidential.

3.5 Analysis and presentation of findings

The findings from the interviews and focus group discussions have been summarised and analysed in terms of the main themes discussed with the respondents. These themes focus on the research questions and the objectives set in this study. The findings follow a narrative structuring style and are based on a five steps to analysing qualitative data (Taylor-Powell and Renner, 2003).

4 Chapter Four – Research Findings

4.1 Introduction

The purpose of this section is to provide detailed information on the research findings. The structure of the section is based on themes that focus on the research following research questions:

- What is the vision and role of the organisation in the community?
- What are the marketing strategies implemented by the FRC?
- What are the current challenges faced by the organisation?

The questions for focus group discussion aimed to find out the users perception and attitude towards the organisation and its services follow the same structure; based on the main themes discussed with the users.

4.2.1 In-depth interviews findings

Originally, it was intended to have six in-depth interviews; unfortunately, one of managers was not available to participate in the interview and the following day she was on leave – by the time she had to return to work, this research was scheduled to be completed. The five managers who took part in the in-depth interviews were:

1. Jean McLaughlin (Dunfanaghy Resource Centre)
2. Marietta Herraghty (Mevagh Resource Centre)

3. Mary Crossan (St. Johnston & Carrigans FRC)
4. Susan McCauley (Cara House FRC)
5. Tony McDaid (Raphoe FRC)

4.2.2 Organisation's vision and role in the community

According to the Family Support Agency (2011) the vision of FRCs is improving the well being of parents and children by supporting all families through the normal challenges of family life. All the respondents were clear on the vision of FRCs in the community. They also further explained what their goals in their particular catchment areas are. Two respondents commented that their goal is to find out what the local needs are and meet those needs by providing those services. One respondent pointed out that their goal is to ensure that everyone in the community either has the support or information within the FRC or put them in touch with an organisation in their own locality (if possible). Another respondent mentioned that their goal is to build up relationships with users so that can they feel safe, significant and supported and another one emphasized that their main objective is to combat poverty, help families at risk and promote the area socially and culturally.

Regarding who their target groups in the community are, all the participants reported that the target groups are defined by the Family Resource Programme 'the family unit - especially those who are at disadvantaged or at risk'. Nevertheless, only two participants reported that they focus on providing services to all the segments that constitute the family unit; meanwhile three interviewees indicated that their main service offerings are aimed to the following target groups:

- People with disabilities (1 respondent)
- Children, women and young people (1 respondent)
- People who have mental health problems and older people (1 respondent)

This information shows that each FRC is unique in the way they operate and in some instances focus on providing services to particular target groups as a response to the local needs. All the participants agreed that the services provided by FRCs were developed as an answer to the local needs identified in community consultations and surveys administered to current and prospective users. All participants agreed that these services not only benefit the local community but also nearby communities and Cross Border Community Initiatives funded by the EU peace programme. The respondents ranked the services according to the number of users:

1. Education and training
2. Outreach Programmes
3. Administrative

This information is in agreement with the SPEAK Report (2011) where Education and Training were reported as the services with the highest number of users.

The role of FRCs in County Donegal is based on a customer-centred view that is common in the practices of non-profit organisations. The respondents reported their main goals in providing services to the target groups. Two respondents answered that it is a way to let people know that they are being listened to. Two respondents answered that their objective is to provide quality service by working closely with staff members and provide affordable

services. One respondent mentioned that their goal is to build up users' trust in the organisation and up skill the resources available.

According to Kotler and Andreasen (1996) the ultimate goal is behaviour change and the proper philosophy is customer centred, it is essential that all strategic planning start with customer behaviour. The respondents listed some techniques they implement to fulfil their role in the community as:

- Personalised attention: Working with a small number of participants in the courses to build up a relationship with the users
- New service development: Providing new services for all age groups and lifestyles regularly
- Focusing on social inclusion
- Keeping users and tutors happy
- Getting funding from other sources to provide more services

All participants expressed that their best strategy to evaluate their services is talking to users on a daily basis to find out if they are satisfied with the services. One manager also reported that users fill an evaluation sheet at the end of their courses. On the other hand, all of them pointed out that there is not a formal system for users in place to register their opinion on the services or make recommendations throughout the year.

Regarding to the positioning of FRCs in the community, the respondents expressed that they wanted to be perceived as:

- A place where people are listened to (two participants)

- An open place where everyone is welcome, accepted (two participants)
- Able to provide for the needs of families-whatever that might be or refer them to get the support they need (one participant)
- A professional image and trustworthy (one participant)
- An organisation that provides value for money (one participant)

When asked who their competitors were, four participants reported that they have no competitors in their catchment area; only one participant reported that their competitors are other community service groups in the area. The respondents pointed out that there are some key aspects that differentiate FRCs in the community. Three respondents answered that FRCs provide unique services in the community, they are quite clear on who the target groups are and the kind of services offered to them. One respondent emphasizes they differentiate by providing services at affordable prices. Two respondents also mentioned that they differentiate by providing innovative service offerings, fulfilling their promises and allowing users to have an input in the services.

4.3.1 Organisations' view on marketing activities

The key findings in this section include the relevance of marketing activities in the organisation, marketing strategies and promotions.

4.3.2 The relevance of marketing activities in the organisations

All the respondents expressed that marketing activities are very important for the organisation. Four participants affirmed that the organisation engages in marketing activities to reach their target groups and build up relationships with users, one participant; however,

expressed that FRCs do not focus enough on marketing activities as people tend to find them rather than FRCs trying to find the target groups.

When asked who was in charge of the organisation's marketing activities; four participants reported that the manager, staff members and volunteers work collectively in marketing activities. One participant reported they have a full time marketing staff working in the organisation's three-year strategic plan and currently doing a survey through Survey Monkey.

4.3.3 Marketing Strategies

The literature identified that not for profit organisations are faced with the same strategic tasks as business concerns: strategic planning, mission definition, objectives setting, implementation, monitoring and evaluation Woodruffe (1995).

When asked about conducting marketing research in the organisation, all of the interviews pointed out that their organisations do not conduct professional marketing research. However, all of them mentioned other forms of researching the market. Three respondents answered that they conduct regular reviews and evaluation of people who had use the services in the past or attended events. One respondent mentioned that they do surveys on a regular basis and another respondent answered that they have community consultations.

Furthermore, the interviewees reported that the main marketing strategies implemented by their organisations are:

- Implementing a ‘Neighbourhood Work Approach’ that implies visiting target users’ homes or engaging them in conversations in different places of the community such as shops, schools and public places in general.
- Analysing the barriers to reach the target users and planning an approach on how to break those barriers.
- Using experience as a criterion to select their marketing strategies – learning from the past and exploring new approaches
- Being able to understand the users’ position in a realistic way and respond to it.

The literature also identified that the strategies used by FRCs is established in the three year strategic plan, which is reviewed regularly by the FRCs.

4.3.4 PROMOTION

Promotional activities to reach the target groups are very important for any organisation and FRCs are also in the position. Woodruffe (1995) asserts that promotion has to be designed as part of integral marketing programme: budget decisions, objectives setting, target audience identification, message selection, promotional means/media selection, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. The respondents provided detailed information on their promotional activities. Firstly, the five respondents explained that their objectives when relaying their intended message to current and prospective users were to let the target users know that their organisation welcomes everyone in the community and that they can have an input in the services.

All the respondents agreed that the key criterion to select the promotional tools is the experience of what had worked in the past. The five respondents also reported that they have

recently started exploring new promotional tools such as Facebook. One respondent suggested that FRCs should have the right balance in their promotional tools. Two respondents also expressed that the cost involved in promotions and the distribution effectiveness are relevant when selecting the promotional tools. One respondent answered that the timing is essential to select the promotional tools since some of them will not have the desired effectiveness in certain times of the year. One respondent also suggested that in order to select the right promotional tools, it is vital to know the target groups well enough in order to decide which mean of communication will be more effective.

The promotional tools used by FRCs were ranked by the respondents according to their level of effectiveness (1: most effective, 7: least effective)

1. Word of mouth
2. Facebook
3. Public Relationship
4. Local Newspaper and Radio
5. Especial events: Open Day, Family Events, End of the year Dinner Party, fundraising activities
6. Newsletter, flyers, church bulletin, e-mail contacts, text messaging
7. Posters

All respondents agreed that the most effective promotional tool is word of mouth. The five participants reported that they work closely with staff members, board of directors and volunteers to promote the services in their communities. One respondent reported that they

present their staff and volunteers with a certificate of appreciation yearly. On the other hand, only one participant reported working with loyal users to promote their services.

The use of online media as a way to promote FRCs is one of the highlights in this section. Four respondents reported that they are currently using Facebook to reach their target groups, especially the youth. Although these respondents expressed that this is an area they need to make improvements. On the other hand, only one participant reported that they have their own web site page, the other four respondents answered that they use the Family Support Agency web site. One participant also mentioned that they have implemented an online community diary to inform users on the events taking place in the community as well as providing this information to other local organisations so activities don't clash.

According to the respondents some of the most relevant promotional tools are the local newspaper and public relations. Public relations can take the form of networking with other organisations, attending national and regional events, annual general meetings and supporting different events in the community. The local newspaper is one of the most used promotional tools by FRCs in County Donegal as they offer free advertisement in the community sections. The respondents reported that they publish in the local newspaper at least once a week.

Four respondents expressed that posters were the least effective of the promotional tools implemented. One respondent however suggested that they could be effective. One participant also suggested that radio is the least effective promotional tool in their particular experience since the intended message can be distorted.

4.4. 1 Challenges

When discussing the current challenges in the sector, the five respondents identified the key issues currently affecting the sector. The respondents' answers were ranked according to their relevance.

1. Funding
2. New Regulations
3. Dependency on Staff and volunteers
4. People's expectations and perceptions on the role of FRCs
5. Providing quality in the services offerings with limited resources

4.4.2 Funding

According to the SPEAK Report (2011) many Family Resource Centres received less than €100,000 in the year 2011. It is not surprising that the five respondents agreed that funding is their main concern at the present time. One interviewee mentioned that the criteria to allocate funding are not well specified so it is difficult to know if certain projects will get the necessary funding. The respondents also mentioned that in some instances FRCs compete with each other to get the funding for their own organisations; the uncertainty on getting the necessary resources to provide services is causing a lack of confidence to be able to fulfil their objectives since there will be more funding cuts in the years to come. Another respondent reported that the core funding is not the only affected area but some organisations or working partners that used to support FRCs, have been also decreased their funding support. Another respondent pointed out that the Peace Funding is also moving onto other

areas, the funding they provided is not there any more and the government is not addressing this situation and as a result many projects are closing. One respondent also mentioned that in many cases, the government system is failing to distribute funding to organisations that really need it and there is lots of bureaucracy involved in the process. Another interviewee commented that the cut in funding leaves them in a very hard position since they are no longer able to subsidise programs for disadvantaged families as well as struggling to pay for the running cost of building. All these points were also identified in the literature through newspaper articles featuring the dramatic changes in the sector.

4.4.3 New Regulations

The respondents also discussed the implications of being under a new agency – The Department of Children and Youth Affairs. Four respondents pointed out that this change implies the establishment of new strategies that focus more on children activities. Three respondents mentioned that they must have a certain number of participants to be run courses in order to justify funding which in many cases can be challenging since many young people have emigrated.

4.4.4 Dependency on Staff and volunteers

The SPEAK Report (2010-2011) points out that the role of staff and volunteers is vital in the operation of FRCs. All the interviewees strongly agreed with this and commented on their concerns about the current situation. One respondent pointed out that the personnel funded by other organisations work in the FRC for a year period; which is not long enough since the work's effectiveness depend on consistency and continuity. It is also uncertainty if funding staff members will be working in the FRCs future projects.

Three interviewees reported that they have a development worker in their organisations but two interviewees mentioned that they do not have one; there is a big need to have a development worker in FRCs since they need to be involved in community consultation to provide the response to the users' needs. Another respondent mentioned two factors affecting the organisation's operation - the decrease in the number of volunteers as a result of emigration and the difficulty to find the right team of people who can pass the vision on to others.

4.4.5 People's expectations on the role of FRCs

In the literature, it was explained that the objective of social enterprises is not making profit and commercial activity is not a priority. As a result, people's perception of the role of FRCs can be challenging. All the respondents commented that they charge a minimum fee for the courses so that users can appreciate the value they offer. One interviewee pointed out they used to offer courses free of charge in the past; recently they have changed their pricing system; which has caused a negative reaction since many users expect FRCs to provide free services to the community. One participant also pointed out that they are expected to deal with all the needs in the area with limited resources and limited staff members. One interviewee also emphasized that it is very challenging 'to be everything for everybody'

4.4.6 Providing quality services offerings with limited resources

One of the main concerns discussed in the in-depth interview was the ability to provide quality services to users with limited resources. One respondent reported that they have to

provide not only in-house services but also use the premises of other local organisations as their own premises is not big enough to hold all the activities organised by them. Another respondent also pointed out that there has been lots of work involved in making their premises suitable for some target groups such as people with disabilities and mothers.

Two respondents also indicated that it could be difficult to keep their services offerings interesting, refreshing and attractive for the target users. Two respondents also mentioned that getting people involved could be a hard task. One respondent also pointed out that social inclusion could also be very challenging in the communities; especially nowadays when the difference between the rich and the poor seem to be more visible.

4.5 Focus Group Findings

A focus group discussion was also conducted by the researcher in order to analyse the effectiveness of the marketing strategies implemented by FRCS. The users of Cara House FRC in Letterkenny were selected as this organisation has one of the highest numbers of users in the county and provides a wide variety of services. The purpose of this discussion was to find out user's perceptions on the services provided in this particular FRC. The respondents were users of the following services: Drop-in Centre, Circle Dancing and Computers. The length of time the respondents have been using the services range between one to nine years. There were seven interviewees in the focus group discussion; they first filled in a questionnaire and then discussed the main points with the group members.

When asked to rank the reasons why they use the services provided in Cara House, six respondents answered that the most important reason was the social contact; on the other hand, five respondents indicated that the least important reason were the facilities and the

location. The seven respondents pointed out that in their opinion the most relevant service provided is the Drop-in Centre. Four respondents indicated that the least important is the service of laundry, transportation, book exchange, Café). During the in-depth interview, the manager of Cara House identified the Drop-in Centre as one of their main service offerings, which agrees with the needs of their current users.

Most respondents (five of them) answered that they heard about the organisation through friends, followed by the local paper and other organisations; which again agrees with the answers provided in the in-depth interviews with managers.

When asked if they are satisfied with the services provided, five respondents answered that they are satisfied, one respondent neither agrees nor disagrees and one respondent disagreed. When asked what kind of changes they can suggest; one respondent suggested Music and Storytelling, four participants pointed out that they would like to have more communication with the staff members and be able to discuss their opinions and make suggestions on the services. This point was also identified during the in-depth interviews.

Four respondents also commented that they are dissatisfied with some of the changes taking place in the organisation. As their main need is social interaction, they feel that they are left with fewer options as the organisation has been forced to close earlier. Three participants also pointed out that they are dissatisfied with the change in the pricing system as they now have to pay 3-5 euro per session.

When asked about their perceptions on Cara House before using the services, all the respondents mentioned that they had none; nevertheless, after using the services five

respondents answered that their perception on Cara House is very positive since it provides them with opportunities to interact with people from all walks of life.

In summary, the focus group discussion points out that the users' deepest need is to have a meaningful interaction with others, to be accepted as they are and to be able to communicate their ideas freely. An interesting fact is that the current users who participated in the discussion, had no perceptions on the organisation previously; which also points out the need to work on strategies to position in the users mind.

5. Chapter Five – Discussion

5.1 Introduction

The purpose of this section is to discuss the outcomes of the methodology employed in this research; literature review, in-depth interviews and focus group discussion.

5.2. The implementation of marketing strategies in Family Resource Centres in County Donegal

According to the literature review and the in-depth interviews the marketing strategy used by FRCS is established in their three year Strategic Plan based on community consultation. This approach can be effective since the information provided by the target groups can serve as a foundation to implement the most suitable strategies. On the other hand, a three-year plan is a considerable long period of time to implement approaches as important changes can take place in the market on a yearly basis. Most respondents in the in-depth interviews pointed out

that they review their strategies regularly; nevertheless, this process can be more effective if the Strategic Plan could be designed on a yearly basis.

One of the main findings identified during the in-depth interviews with managers of FRCs is the need to do marketing research in their catchment areas. Some of the factors causing this situation could be their limited budget as well as the implementation of other strategies to research their target groups. According to Kotler and Andreasen (1996) effective research requires that non-profit organisations have a marketing research mission, a long-term strategy, a budget, an approach to carry out individual projects and a system of evaluation and control.

As already mentioned FRCs carried out survey and community consultation to find out the needs of their target market; nevertheless, it is necessary to establish a method to conduct effective marketing research. Smith and Albaum (2005) state that marketing research is the systematic and objective search for, and analysis of information relevant to the identification and solution of any problem in the field of marketing ; careful planning throughout all stages of research is a necessity.

FRCs used a wide variety of promotional tools according to the in-depth interviews. One of the highlights is the use of social media to reach the target groups. Facebook has been reported as the most recent promotional tool used by FRCS; and the results show that it has been a positive change especially to reach the youth segment. It is necessary to find out Facebook's effectiveness to reach other segments such as adults and older people. Most respondents also reported that they needed to up skill the use of Facebook and technology in

general to promote the organisation; which could imply investing on training courses for staff members.

5.3. An evaluation of FRC's marketing performance

According to the literature review and in-depth interviews, the SPEAK Report is the main strategy for FRCs to evaluate their marketing performance. In this way, the SPEAK Report can help identify their strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats in the current market. The focus group discussion proved to be an effective research methodology to evaluate an organisation's marketing performance. One of the main findings during focus group discussion pointed out the need to establish a system in the organisation for users themselves to evaluate the services. It is necessary to establish strategies to register the users' opinions, ideas and suggestions on the services on a regular basis. This can be done through Facebook, the organisation's web page, surveys or using a suggestion box in the organisation.

On the other hand, staff members are also in a good position to evaluate the services and make suggestions to improve the services as they deal with users regularly. Kotler and Andreasen (1996) emphasize that the exchanges in the non-profit sector are usually high involvement and often concern target audience behaviours. As the philosophy of FRCs is customer centred, it is vital to work closely with the internal and external customers to evaluate the marketing performance of the organisation. Adirondack (1998) states that organisations should implement techniques to monitor the most relevant aspects of the service process based on the organisation's projects, how people find out about them and what users think about them, use of resources and what the organization is doing.

6. 1 Chapter Six – Conclusion & Recommendations

Dolan *et al* (2004) provides a good definition and summary of the tasks that characterise FRCs in Ireland – ‘Family Support is defined as both a style of work and a set of activities which reinforce positive informal social networks through integrated programmes, combining statutory, voluntary, community and private services, primarily focused on early intervention across a range of levels and needs with the aim of promoting and protecting the health, wellbeing and rights of all children, young people and their families in their own homes and communities, with particular attention to those who are vulnerable or at risk’.

The Irish Times (1999) asserts that the voluntary sector makes a significant contribution to the economy and its work is more efficient, more economic than that of the state. In an interview, Dennis O’Connor, founding director of 2into3 commented "When people talk about the economy in Ireland, they still talk about the private and public sectors but do not talk about the third sector or non-profit sector. We want the third sector to start being included in the wider economy. It does operate differently but there is still a fair bit to go yet here" (Business & Finance, 2008). Helmig *et al* (2004) also note that the marketing strategies implemented by non-profit organisations differ from marketing in for-profit organisations in the following aspects: non-profit organisations marketing need to market products and services to a wide range of target groups and the marketing strategies can help attract resources as well as allocate resources.

Based on the literature review and in-depth interviews, the demand for the services provided by FRCs in the local communities has been increasing recently. While in the past, using these services might have been considered as a last resort option; these days, most people considered this as a valid and good choice.

However, there are some recommendations to consider as a best practice model for the implementation of marketing strategies’.

Firstly, it is necessary to reinforce this positive perception by implementing marketing strategies so that the public can have a better understanding of the principles underlying the services provided in the short and long term. Voeth and Herbst (2008) reports that an increasing number of non-profit marketers are attempting to exploit the profiling potentials of branding; the personality scale (sincerity, excitement, competence, sophistication and ruggedness) can help non-profit organisations to remain distinct and build strong relationships with their customers.

One of the challenges identified during in-depth interviews is that of pricing. Zeithaml and Bitner (1996) report that one of the most important types of external communications in services is the price of the service. As non-profit organisations’ goal is to provide services to the target groups at affordable prices, setting service or product price must be taken seriously to communicate a consistent message to the market. Value pricing ‘giving more for less’ is an approach that can suit the vision of not for profit organisations.

At the heart of every FRCs is the need to interact with the members of the community, build up relationships and find out what kind of services need to be provided. In this regard, the role of a development worker in the organisation is vital in the organisation. Only three interviewees reported that they have a development worker in their organisation, which means that the other FRCS are at disadvantage as they are unable to conduct the kind of

research necessary to find out the needs of the target groups. Targeting future volunteers for the organisations should also be a priority for FRCs in County Donegal.

It is necessary to establish the most suitable marketing tools to communicate the value of volunteering in their local FRC. Randle and Dolnicar (2009) points out that there is a growing competition in the nonprofit sector making more sophisticated use of marketing techniques to attract the right type of volunteers.

The Irish Times (2001) reports that some non-profit organisations were offering companies an opportunity for their employees to volunteer in some projects to gain valuable skills and experience which they can then transfer in their work.

The strategy's success is also dependent on having the right people on board who can understand the needs of the local community in order to establish the most effective programme of work for the community. The literature reported that there is a stipulation that ensures that the Board of Directors is 'predominantly comprised of the community of intended beneficiaries consisting of people that have first-hand experience of poverty and disadvantage in their own lives'. Having members of the community themselves as active members in the management of the Family Resource Centre can be an effective strategy as they belong to the target groups.

All respondents in the in-depth interviews reported that one of their main concerns is providing quality service with a restricted budget as a result of funding cut. The manager of St. Johnston & Carrigans FRC commented that 'the focus now is on surviving not providing'.

So how can FRCs still provide quality service with the restrictions in budget?

Firstly, it is necessary to establish a strategy on how voluntary and community sector autonomy is maintained in the funding relationship with government. Hayes (1999) suggest that government and the voluntary sector have a mutually dependent relationship, one where government depends on the voluntary sector to supplement its own service input, and where the voluntary sector depends on government to a large degree for funding and regulations.

Boyle and Butler (2003) highlight the need for a re structure approach to the funding relationship between the voluntary and community sector and government in Ireland at the following levels:

- *A National Level:* A national agreement setting out the broad parameters governing the relationship between the voluntary and community sector and government, including funding be devised.
- *A Sectoral or Local Level:* A detailed framework agreements be reached the voluntary and community sector.
- *An Organisational Level:* The practice of developing service agreements to provide a particular focus on the outcomes to be achieved by voluntary and community organisations with public funds.

This analysis can help clarify the position of FRCs regarding their partnership with the government and to work on strategies to reduce their dependability on government funding. For instance, the manager of Raphoe FRC commented that they publish a monthly newsletter; the local businessmen pay a fee to advertise their companies in the publication and in this

way the production of this publication is free for the FRC. He also reported that they work on providing some services that require a minimum expense for the organisation but still fulfil their goals in the community.

The requirements for a best practice model can be challenging for FRCs in County Donegal; it implies hard work, resources and commitment. Duplication of services could also represent a challenge in some areas of the county where Community Services Groups and other local organisations provide similar services for the target groups. This issue should be also researched in future studies. Nonetheless, these days a key ingredient for a successful marketing strategy is creativity to solve problems in new but not least effective way.

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Appendix A

List of Family Resource Centres that participated in the research

1. Dunfanaghy Resource Centre, 9th July 2012
2. Mevagh Resource Centre, 9th July 2012
3. St. Johnston & Carrigans FRC, 12th July 2012
4. Cara House FRC, 17th July 2012
5. Raphoe FRC, 12th July 2012

Appendix B

Application Form for Ethical Approval

SECTION A

Project Title Marketing Family Resource Centres: A case study of Cara House

Date of Submission July 27th, 2012

Name of all person(s) submitting research proposal
Blanca Elizabeth Agüero

Type of Research Taught Masters MSc by Research External Research Funding

Position Student Staff
If student, Student No. L00068081
Programme Title
Name of supervisor MSc in Marketing Practice.
Supervisor: Dr. Simon Stephens

Department/Centre Business

Email Address L00068081@student.lyit.ie

Name of Principal Researcher (if different from above e.g., Student's Supervisor)
N/A

Position Held N/A

Pre-existing approval and Multi-agency research

1. If your research has pre-existing ethics approval please attach the approval and submit directly to Berni Carlin in the Development Office (researchethics@lyit.ie).
2. If your research is to be carried out across two or more research centres and ethics approval has already been granted by another agency/institution then please attach the approval and submit to Berni Carlin in the Development Office (researchethics@lyit.ie).

In both instances there is no requirement to complete the remainder of the application form.

SECTION B

1. Describe the purposes of the research proposed.

To examine the implementation of marketing strategies in Cara House Family Resource Centre and Community Service Groups in Letterkenny.

2. Please complete the research ethics checklist below:

	YES	NO
a) Does the research involve human or animal participants?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
b) Does the research involve data of a personal or confidential nature?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
c) Does the study involve participants who are particularly vulnerable or unable to give informed consent e.g. people under 18, people with learning disabilities, older people, students?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
d) Will the study require the co-operation of a gatekeeper for access to participants? (e.g. teacher, local council)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
e) Will it be necessary for participants to take part in the study without their knowledge and consent at the time? (e.g. covert observation of people in non-public places)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
f) Will the study involve discussion of sensitive topics (e.g. sexual activity, drug use)?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
g) Are there issues of safety for the researchers or subjects, aside from those documented in Institute or Departmental Health and Safety procedures?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
h) Could the study induce psychological stress or anxiety or cause harm or negative consequences beyond the risks encountered in normal life?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
i) Will financial inducements (other than reasonable expenses and compensation for time) be offered to participants?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
j) Does the research involve a conflict of interests?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

If you have answered 'NO' to all of the questions above there is no requirement to complete the remainder of the form. Please submit to Berni Carlin in the Development Office (researchethics@lyit.ie)

If you have answered 'yes' to questions (c) please continue and complete the remainder of the application form submit to Berni Carlin in the Development Office (researchethics@lyit.ie)

SECTION C

3. Please give a summary of the design and methodology of the project. **Please note** that copies of proposed questionnaires or a list of questions that will be included in any questionnaire should accompany this application form (Compulsory not optional). Please also include in this section details of the proposed sample size, giving indications of the calculations used to determine the required sample size, including any assumptions you may have made. (If in doubt, please obtain statistical advice).

Methodology : Qualitative research method will be used in the form of:

- In- depth interviews: There will be a total of 6 in- depth interviews with managers of the following Family resource Centres in County Donegal: Cara House FRC(Letterkenny)
 - *Donegal FRC (Donegal)
 - *DunfanaghyFRC(Dunfanaghy)
 - *MevaghFRC(Downings)
 - *RaphoeFRC(Raphoe)
 - *St. Johnson&CarrigansFRC(Liffort)

- Focus Group with users of Cara House FRC (Letterkenny): A questionnaire on their perceptions, expectations, and opinions on the services provided by Cara House will be administered before the discussion. There will be 8 adult participants (4 men and 4 women), each of them users of different courses and services provided by Cara House

4. Describe the research procedures as they affect the research subject and any other parties involved.

The research procedure includes the following:

-Proposal

-Literature Review

-Methodology

-Data Collection:

- In-depth interviews: Managers will be contacted to explain them the purpose of the research, find out their willingness to participate and establish a time that suits them. They will then receive a copy of the interview questions prior to the interview and a date for the interview will be confirmed.
- Focus group: Cara House's manager will be contacted in order to explain the purpose of the focus group discussion and questions to be discussed. Participants from different courses and services will be then selected, contacted and a date for the focus group discussion will be confirmed.

-Research Findings and Analysis: Another interview with Cara House's manager will be arranged to clarify specific issues discussed in the Focus group in order to conclude resarch findings.

-Conclusions and recommendations

5. What in your opinion are the ethical considerations involved in this proposal? (You may wish for example to comment on issues to do with consent, confidentiality, risk to subjects, etc.)

Confidentiality is a key issue for participants of the focus group as their personal opinion, perception and judgement on the services will be discussed in details.

6. Outline the reasons which lead you to be satisfied that the possible benefits to be gained from the project justify any risks or discomforts involved.

The information provided by users can be a valuable tool to analyse research findings, to make conclusions and recommendations for the organisations.

7. Who are the investigators (including assistants) who will conduct the research and what are their qualifications and experience?

The Researcher (Blanca Agüero), a MSc in Marketing Practice student at Lyit, is the only investigator who will conduct the research.

8. Are arrangements for the provision of clinical facilities to handle emergencies necessary? If so, briefly describe the arrangements made.

N/A

9. In cases where subjects will be identified from information held by another party (for example, a doctor or hospital) describe the arrangements you intend to make to gain access to this information including, where appropriate, which Multi Centre Research Ethics Committee or Local Research Ethics Committee will be applied to.

N/A

10. Specify whether subjects will include students or others in a dependent relationship.

N/A

11. Specify whether the research will include children or people with mental illness, disability or handicap. If so, please explain the necessity of involving these individuals as research subjects.

N/A

12. Will payment or any other incentive, such as a gift or free services, be made to any research subject? If so, please specify and state the level of payment to be made and/or the source of the funds/gift/free service to be used. Please explain the justification for offering payment or other incentive.

N/A

13. Please give details of how consent is to be obtained. A copy of the proposed consent form, along with a separate information sheet, written in simple, non-technical language **MUST** accompany this form.

The researcher will contact prospect interviewees to discuss consent verbally first. If prospect interviewees are in agreement with the requirements involved in their participation in the research, the researcher will ask them to sign a consent form.

14. Comment on any cultural, social or gender-based characteristics of the subject which have affected the design of the project or which may affect its conduct.

Focus group participants were selected taking into account the number of males vs female participants (4 participants from each gender). Participants also belong to different courses, interest groups and users of services in general; this indicates that they probably come from different cultural and social backgrounds. This will allow the researcher to find out views of participants who represent different customer segments.
The design of this project was designed taking into account the cultural, social and gender-based characteristics of the participants.

15. Please state who will have access to the data and what measures which will be adopted to maintain the confidentiality of the research subject and to comply with data protection requirements e.g. will the data be anonymised?

The data will be anonymised. The researcher and the supervisor (Dr. Simon Stephens) will have access to the data. Focus group participants will not be identified by names neither in the questionnaire forms nor the discussion. Interviews with managers and discussions with the focus group will be recorded by the researcher. The recording and materials used for data collection will be kept by the researcher.

16. Will the intended group of research subjects, to your knowledge, be involved in other research? If so, please justify.

N/A

17. Date on which the project will begin and end.

The project starts in April and ends in July 27th.

18. Please state location(s) where the project will be carried out.

The project will be carried out in County Donegal, in the venue of the following organisations:

- Cara House FRC(Letterkenny)
- *Donegal FRC (Donegal)
- *DunfanaghyFRC(Dunfanaghy)
- *MevaghFRC(Downings)
- *RaphoeFRC(Raphoe)
- *St. Johnson&CarrigansFRC(Liffort)

19. Please state briefly any precautions being taken to protect the health and safety of researchers and others associated with the project (as distinct from the research subjects) e.g. where blood samples are being taken

N/A

20. Please specify how any data obtained during the course of the research will be stored and how long the data will be retained for.

The researcher will store recordings of interviews and focus group discussion in a personal file. The researcher will retain all data obtained during the research process for a year.

DECLARATION

Researcher

I confirm I will carry out the research as indicated in the above form

Research Supervisor

I confirm that this form gives an accurate account of the proposed research

Appendix C

Interview Questions

a) Organisation's background:

1. Can you briefly describe the background/history of your organization?
2. What kind of changes and developments has the organization experienced in recent years?

b) Organisation's view on marketing activities:

3. Marketing can be defined as 'the process by which companies create value for customers and build strong customer relationships'. How does this tie in with the company's view on current market activities?
4. Who is in charge of marketing activities in the organization?
5. Does the company carry out marketing research? If so, how are the findings used in the organization?

c) Marketing objectives & strategies:

6. What are the organisation's objectives?
7. What types of strategies are used in order to achieve your objectives?

d) Target Groups:

8. What are your target groups?
9. What criteria did you use to select the groups you serve?

10. Do you focus on providing more services to a specific group? If so, what criteria were taken into account?

e) Service offerings:

11. What are the organisation's main service offerings?

12. What do you hope to achieve by providing these services?

13. How does the organization differentiate itself from competitors in terms of service offerings?

e) Positioning

14. How does the organization wish to be perceived by current and prospective customers?

f) Promotions:

13. What are the organisation's objectives when relaying your intended message?

14. What types of strategies are used in order to create awareness of the organisation's service offerings?

15. Which of the following promotional tools are used by the organisation?

Please explain their role in the organisation

* Public relations

* Advertisement (media, radio, leaflets, social media, etc)

* Personal selling/Word of mouth

* Price promotions

16. What criteria are used to select these promotional tools?
17. Which of these promotional tools are the most/least effective ones?

g) Challenges & Future plans to satisfy customer needs and wants

18. What are the organisations' main challenges to serve users more effectively?
19. In what ways does the organisation's plan to satisfy customer needs and wants?

Appendix D

Focus Group Questions

Objectives: To find out users expectations and perceptions on Cara House

Methodology: Participants will be asked to fill out a questionnaire before group discussion; this will give them an opportunity to reflect on the questions and feel more relax when discussing them in the group.

This questionnaire is part of a research project to find out users' expectations and perceptions on Cara House. Answers are confidential. Thanks for your cooperation

Please tick the age group you belong to

- 15-24
- 25-44
- 45-64
- Over 65

Course/Programme/ Service: _____

How long have you been using Cara House's services? _____

How did you hear about Cara House?_____

Please rank (1-9) your reasons to use Cara House services. (Write 1 for your most important reason, 9 for the least important reason)

- Job prospects
- Social contacts
- Hobby
- Affordable prices
- Location
- Facilities
- Friendly atmosphere
- Helpful tutors & staff members
- Other:-----

Please rank the service lines below according to their relevance in your own opinion.

Write 1 for your most preferred service, 2 for the next preferred, then 3 for the next, 4 for the next, 5 for the next and 6 for the least preferred:

- Educational & recreational courses
- Drop-in centre
- Crèche & After School Club
- The Youth Café
- Services (Laundry, transportation, Cara Café, book exchange)
- Volunteering opportunities

I am satisfied with the services provided by Cara House

Strongly disagree Disagree Neither Agree Strongly agree

What kind of changes would you suggest to improve the service quality?

Please state your perceptions on Cara House:

*** Before** using the services:

*** After** using the services:

Appendix D

List of abbreviations

- FRC: Family Resource Centre
- FSA: Family Support Agency
- FSP: Family Support Program
- SPEAK: Strategic Planning Evaluation and Knowledge - networking